

My name is Carina Drake, I live in Ridgefield, Connecticut. I support HB 5372, An Act Concerning Dyslexia Instruction in Teacher Preparation, and so should you.

My daughter is a student in Ridgefield Public Schools. We embarked on our journey with dyslexia at a great emotional and financial cost, as our daughter struggled; I relived my own dyslexia struggles. It is baffling that we have not solved a solvable issue for our dyslexic children. The number of individuals who end up in prison who have dyslexia and cannot read is abhorrent. The many dyslexics struggling with mental health and addiction disorders secondary to reading failure is heartbreaking. When history looks back on this time, I hope you can say you were on the right side of a systemic denial of children their right to an appropriate education. How is it that I was able to attain remediation through Orton Gillingham methodology thirty years ago, but we still had not brought almost 100 years of evidence based best practices to the classroom? How was it that our teachers were not given our full support in helping all children read? How can we allow for children to struggle when we have the remedy? I could not be an accomplice and I beg you not to be a bystander. As a registered nurse, I knew I had to learn more and become actively engaged in this process. I started advocating with decoding dyslexia and I am very proud of our Connecticut families. I thank those who have supported our efforts.

As our district brought in more training for our dedicated teachers, I saw my daughter's journey transformed. I saw her confidence grow and the joy and light come back into her spirit. Her teachers grew in confidence and I realized they shared my passion for all children's literacy. Our school principal became an ally and backed both his students and his teachers' training in Orton Gillingham methodology. My daughter who was diagnosed at six was able to meet third grade reading standards as a result of my advocacy, teacher support, a principal's support, and your choice in supporting legislation that mandated change!

Thank you for your support of our dyslexia efforts and supporting our dyslexic children. It is not lost on me that our law makers are also partners in our stories. The pace of this change is not enough, our dyslexic children are being left behind, but we have hope that tomorrow there will be a day when we see an end to the "school to prison pipeline."

Every child in our state and in our nation should have the opportunity to learn to read. All children are worthy of teachers prepared to empower them in the pursuit of their dreams. Dyslexic children should not be held back when we have the remedy for them and their teachers. We must fortify the link between dyslexic students and teachers. The prerequisite for teaching should include training and knowledge in dyslexia as part of collegiate teacher preparation. We face challenges as training in our

districts requires financial resources. Additionally, the training imposes time away from class for our teachers, which exacerbates divisiveness in our communities.

Teachers equipped with the evidenced based best practices needed to recognize and remediate dyslexia are qualified to change the trajectory of dyslexic students' lives. 90% of children who are identified and receive remediation at age six reach grade level reading goals (Vellutino, Stanton, Sipay, Small Pratt, 1996). In Dr. Shaywitz's longitudinal studies in Connecticut, they found that children struggling with reading in later elementary years continued to struggle throughout their academic lives. My daughter's experience should not be the exception, it should be the expectation. We want our teachers prepared for success. In Ridgefield, we have not effectively allocated funds for structured literacy programming with fidelity for our dyslexic students. In fact, this year, some of that preparation was cut from our budget. Dyslexic children continue to suffer in our district as access to a teacher with expertise in structured literacy methods is not equitable across the district. Please vote to support this legislation! It will enable teachers to have the appropriate training in their college preparation to meet the needs of dyslexic students and save districts the costs to make up for this loss later!

Thank you,

Carina Drake, Dyslexic mother of a dyslexic daughter

Ridgefield, CT